

THE
CAUSES
OF THE
PRESENT DISTRACTIONS
IN
AMERICA
EXPLAINED:
IN
TWO LETTERS
TO A
MERCHANT
IN LONDON.

By F_____, B_____,

Printed in the Year 1774.

THE
CAUSES
OF THE
PRESENT DISTRACTIONS

AMERICA
EXPLAINED

TWO
VOLUMES
IN
A



MERCHANT

IN LONDON.

By F. B.

Printed in the Year 1774.

LETTER I.

S I R,

From the time that the colonies were first considered as capable of granting aids to the Crown, down to the end of the last war; it is said that the constant mode of obtaining those aids was by requisition made from the Crown through its Governors to the several Assemblies,

in circular letters from the Secretary of State in his Majesty's name, setting forth the occasion, requiring them to take the matter into consideration, and expressing a reliance on their prudence, duty and affection to his Majesty's government, that they would grant such sums, or raise such numbers of men, as were suitable to their respective circumstances.

The colonies being accustomed to this method, have from time to time granted money to the Crown, or raised troops for its service, in proportion to their abilities, and, during all the last war, beyond their abilities, so that considerable sums were returned them yearly by Parliament, as exceeding their proportion.

Had this happy method been continued (a method which left the King's subjects in those remote countries the pleasure of shewing their zeal and loyalty, and of imagining that they recommended themselves to their Sovereign by the liberality of their voluntary grants) there is no doubt but all the money that could reasonably be expected to be raised from them, in any manner, might have been obtained from them, without the least heart-burning, offence, or breach of the harmony of affections and interests that so long subsisted between the two countries.

It

It has been thought wisdom in a government, exercising sovereignty over different kinds of people, to have some regard to prevailing and established opinions among the people to be governed, wherever such opinions might in their effects promote or obstruct public measures.—If they tend to obstruct public service, they are to be changed before we act against them, and they can only be changed by reason and persuasion.—But if public service can be carried on without thwarting those opinions, if they can be on the contrary made subservient to it, they are not unnecessarily to be thwarted, how absurd soever such popular opinions may be in their natures.

This had been the wisdom of our government, with respect to raising money in the colonies.. It was well known that the colonists universally were of opinion, that no money could be levied from English subjects, but by their own consent, given by themselves or their chosen representatives. That therefore, whatever money was to be raised from the people in the colonies, must first be granted by their assemblies, as the money raised in Britain is first to be granted by the House of Commons. That this right of granting their own money was essential to English liberty; and that if any man, or body of men, in which they had no representative of their choosing, could

could tax them at pleasure, they could not be said to have any property, any thing they could call their own. But as these opinions did not hinder their granting money voluntarily and amply, whenever the Crown, by its servants, came into their assemblies (as it does into its Parliaments of Britain and Ireland) and demanded aids, therefore that method was chosen, rather than the baneful one of arbitrary taxes.

I do not undertake here to support those opinions; they have been refuted by a late act of Parliament, declaring its own power; which very Parliament, however, shewed wisely so much tender regard to those inveterate prejudices, as to repeal a tax that had odiously militated against them.—And these prejudices are still so fixed and rooted in the Americans, that it is supposed not a single man among them has been convinced of his error by that act of parliament.

The Minister, therefore, who first projected to lay aside the accustomed method of requisition, and to raise money on America by stamps, seems not to have acted wisely in deviating from that method (which the colonists looked upon as constitutional) and thwarting unnecessarily, the general fixed prejudices of so great a number of the King's subjects. It was
not,

not, however, for want of knowledge that what he was about to do would give them great offence; he appears to have been very sensible of this, and apprehensive that it might occasion some disorders, to prevent or suppress which he projected another bill, that was brought in the same session with the stamp act, whereby it was to be made lawful for military officers in the colonies to quarter their soldiers in private houses. This seemed intended to awe the people into a compliance with the other act. Great opposition, however, being raised here against the bill, by the agents from the colonies, and the merchants trading thither, the colonists declaring that, under such a power in the army, no one could look on his house as his own, or think he had a home, when soldiers might be thrust into it, and mixed with his family, at the pleasure of an officer, that part of the bill was dropt; but there still remained a clause, when it passed into a law, to oblige the several assemblies to provide quarters for the soldiers, furnishing them with fire, beds, candles, small beer or rum, and fundry other articles, at the expence of the several provinces.—And this act continued in force when the stamp-act was repealed, though, if obligatory on the assemblies, it equally militated against the American principle above-mentioned, that money is not to be raised on English subjects without their consent.

The

The colonies nevertheless, being put into high good humour by the repeal of the stamp-act, chose to avoid a fresh dispute upon the other, it being temporary, and soon to expire, never (as they hoped) to revive again; and in the mean time they, by various ways, provided for the quartering of the troops, either by acts of their own assemblies, without taking notice of the acts of Parliament, or by some variety on small diminution (as of salt and vinegar) in the supplies required by the Act, that what they did might appear a voluntary act of their own, and not done in obedience to an act of parliament, which they thought contrary to right, and therefore void in itself.

It might have been well if the matter had thus passed without notice; but an officious Governor having written home an angry and aggravating letter upon this conduct in the assembly of his province, the outed projector of the stamp-act, and his adherents, then in the opposition, raised such a clamour against America, as in rebellion, &c. and against those who had been for the repeal of the stamp-act, as having thereby been encouragers of this supposed rebellion, that it was thought necessary to enforce the quartering act by another act of Parliament, taking away from the province of New-York, which had been most explicit in its refusal, all the powers of legislation, till it should

should have complied with that act : The news of which greatly alarmed the people every where in America, as the language of such an act seemed to be Obey implicitly laws made by the Parliament of Great Britain, to force money from you without your consent, or you shall enjoy no rights or privileges at all.

At the same time the late Chancellor of the Exchequer, desirous of ingratiating himself with the opposition, or driven to it by their clamours, projected the levying more money from America, by new duties on various articles of our own manufacture, as glass, paper, painters colours, &c. appointing a new board of customs, and sending over a set of commissioners (with large salaries) to be established at Boston, who were to have the care of collecting these duties ; and which were, by the act, expressly mentioned to be intended for the payment of the salaries of Governors, Judges, and other officers of the Crown in America, it being a pretty general opinion here, that those officers ought not to depend on the people there for any part of their support.

It is not my intention to combat this opinion ; but perhaps it may be some satisfaction to you to know what ideas the Americans have on the subject. They say then, as to Governors, that they are not like Princes whose
posteriority

posterity have an inheritance in the government of a nation, and therefore an interest in its prosperity; they are generally strangers to the provinces they are sent to govern; have no estate, natural connection, or relation there, to give them an affection for the country; that they come only to make money as fast as they can, are frequently men of vicious characters and broken fortunes, sent merely to get them off the hands of a minister somewhere out of the way; as that they intend staying in the country no longer than their government continues, and purpose to leave no family behind them, they are apt to be regardless of the good will of the people, and care not what is said or thought of them after they are gone. Their situation gives them many opportunities of being vexatious, and they are often so, notwithstanding their dependance on the assemblies for all that part of their support that does not arise from fees established by law, but would probably be much more so if they were to be fully supported by money drawn from the people, without the consent or good will of the people, which is the professed design of this act. That if by means of the enforced duties, government is to be supported in America, without the intervention of the assemblies, their assemblies will soon be looked upon as useless, and a Governor will not call them, as having nothing to hope from their meeting,

and

and perhaps something to fear from their enquiries into, and remonstrances against his mal-administration; that thus the people will be deprived of their most essential rights; that its being, as at present, a Governor's interest to cultivate the good will, by promoting the welfare of the people he governs, can be attended with no prejudice to the Mother-Country, since all the laws he may be prevailed to give his assent to, are subject to a revision here, and if reported against by the Board of Trade, as hurtful to the interest of this country, may, and are immediately repealed by the Crown; nor dare he pass any law contrary to his instructions, as he holds his office during the pleasure of the Crown, and his Securities are liable for the penalties of their bonds, if he contravenes those instructions.

—This is what they say as to Governors.—

As to Judges, they alledge, that being appointed from hence by the Crown, and holding their commissions, not during good behaviour, as in Britain, but during pleasure, all the weight of interest would be thrown into one of the scales (which ought to be held even) if the salaries are also to be paid out of duties forced from the people without their consent, and independent of their Assemblies approbation or disapprobation of the Judges
C behaviour;

behaviour; that where the Crown will grant commissions to able and honest Judges during good behaviour, the Assemblies will settle permanent and ample salaries on them during their commissions; but at present they have no other means of getting rid of an ignorant, unjust Judge (and some of scandalous characters have, they say, been sent them) but by starving him out.

I do not suppose these reasonings of the Americans will have much weight in them. I do not produce them with an expectation of convincing you. I relate them merely in pursuance of the task I have imposed on myself, to be an impartial Historian of American facts and opinions.

L E T T E R II.

THE Colonists being greatly alarmed, as I observed in my last, by news of the act for abolishing the legislature of New-York, and the imposition of these new duties, professedly for such disagreeable, and to them appearing dangerous purposes; accompanied by a new set of Revenue officers, with large appointments, which gave strong suspicion that

that more business of the same kind was soon to be provided for them, that they might earn those salaries, began seriously to consider their situation, and to revolve afresh in their minds, grievances, which from their respect and love for this country, they had long borne, and seemed almost willing to forget. They reflected how lightly the interests of all America had been esteemed here, when the interest of a few inhabitants of Great-Britain happened to have the smallest competition with it. That thus the whole American people were forbidden the advantage of a direct importation of wine, oil, and fruit from Portugal, but must take them loaded with all the expences of a voyage of one thousand leagues round about, being to be landed first in England, to be re-shipped for America: expences amounting, in war-time, at least to thirty per cent. more than otherwise they would have been charged with, and all this, merely that a few Portugal merchants in London might gain a commission on those goods passing through their hands.—Portugal Merchants, by the bye, who complain loudly of the smallest hardships laid on their trade by foreigners, and yet even the last year, could oppose with all their influence the giving ease to their fellow-subjects under so heavy an oppression—That on a frivolous complaint of a few Virginia Merchants, nine colonies were restrained

from making paper-money, though become absolutely necessary for their internal commerce, from the constant remittance of their gold and silver to Britain.—But not only the interest of a particular body of merchants, the interest of any small body of British tradesmen or artificers, has been found, they say, to outweigh that of all the King's subjects in the colonies.

There cannot be a stronger natural right than that of a man's making the best profit he can of the natural produce of his lands, provided he does not thereby injure the State in general. Iron is to be found every where in America, and beaver furs are the natural produce of that country. Hats and nails, and steel, are wanted there as well as here. It is no importance to the common welfare of the Empire, whether a subject gets his living by making hats on this or that side of the water; yet the hatters of England have prevailed! so far as to obtain an act in their own favour, restraining that manufacture in America, in order to oblige the Americans to send their beaver to England, to be manufactured, and purchase back the hats loaded with the charges of a double transportation. In the same manner have a few Nail-makers, and still a smaller number of Steel-makers (perhaps there are not half a dozen of these in England) prevailed totally

totally to forbid, by an act of Parliament, the erecting of flitting-mills, and steel-furnaces in America, that the Americans may be obliged to take nails for their buildings, and steel for their tools from these artificers under the same disadvantages. Added to these, the Americans remembered the act authorizing the most cruel insult that perhaps was ever offered by one people to another, that of emptying our gaols into their settlements (Scotland too, has within these few years, obtained the privilege it had not before, of sending its rogues and villains to the plantations) an insult aggravated by that barbarous, ill-placed sarcasm in a report of the Board of Trade, when one of the provinces complained of the act. " It " is necessary that it should be continued for " the better peopling of your Majesty's colonies." I say, reflecting on those things, the Americans said to one another (their newspapers are full of discourses) these people are not content with making a monopoly of us, forbidding us to trade with any other country of Europe, and compelling us to buy every thing of them, though in many articles we could furnish ourselves 10, 20, and even 50 per cent. cheaper elsewhere; but now they have as good as declared they have a right to tax us, *ad libitum*, internally and externally; and that our constitution and liberties shall all be taken away if we do not submit to that claim. They
are

are not content with the high prices at which they sell us their goods, but have now begun to enhance those prices by new duties; and by the expensive apparatus of a new set of officers, they appear to intend an augmentation and multiplication of those burthens that shall still be more grievous to us. Our people have been foolishly fond of their superfluous modes and manufactures, to their impoverishing our country, carrying off all our cash, and loading us with debt; they will not suffer us to restrain the luxury of our inhabitants as they do that of their own, by laws; they can make laws to discourage or prohibit the importation of French superfluities; but though those of England are as ruinous to us as the French ones are to them; if we make a law of that kind, they immediately repeal it. Thus they get all our money from us by trade, and every profit we can any where make by our fishery, our produce, and our commerce, centers finally with them! But this does not satisfy. It is time then to take care of ourselves, by the best means in our power. Let us unite in solemn resolutions and engagements with and to each other, that we will give these new officers as little trouble as possible by not consuming the British manufactures, on which they are to levy the duties. Let us agree to consume no more of their expensive gew-gaws; let us live frugally; and let us industriously manu-

manufacture what we can for ourselves; thus we shall be able honourably to discharge the debts we already owe them, and after that, we may be able to keep some money in our country, not only for the uses of our internal commerce, but for the service of our gracious Sovereign, whenever he shall have occasion for it, and think proper to require it of us in the old constitutional manner. For notwithstanding the reproaches thrown out against us in the public papers and pamphlets; notwithstanding we have been reviled in their Senate as rebels and traitors, we are truly a loyal people. Scotland has had its rebellions, and England its plots, against the present royal family; but America is untainted with those crimes; there is in it scarce a man, there is not a single native of our country who is not firmly attached to his King by principle and by affection. But a new kind of loyalty seems to be required of us, a loyalty to Parliament; a loyalty that is to extend, it seems, to a surrender of all our properties, whenever a House of Commons, in which there is not a single member of our choosing, shall think fit to grant them away without our consent, and to a patient suffering the loss of our privileges as Englishmen, if we cannot submit to make such surrender. We were separated too far from Britain by the ocean, but we were united strongly to it by respect and love, so that we could at any time
freely

freely have spent our lives and little fortunes in its cause; but this unhappy new system of politics tends to dissolve those bands of union, and to sever us forever. Woe to the man that first adopted it! Both countries will long have cause to execrate his memory.

These are the wild ravings of the at present half distracted Americans. To be sure no reasonable man in England can approve of such sentiments, and, as I said before, I do not pretend to support or justify them; but I sincerely wish, for the sake of the manufactures and commerce of Great-Britain, and for the sake of the strength a firm union with our growing colonies would give us, that those people had never been thus needlessly driven out of their senses.



F. B.

F I N I S.